DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 361 CE 082 749

AUTHOR	Stein, David; Rocco, Tonette S.
TITLE	The Older Worker. Myths and Realities.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	No-18
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0013
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Age Differences; Age Discrimination; Aging (Individuals); Career Change; *Career Development; Career Education; Employer Attitudes; Job Training; Lifelong Learning; Older Adults; *Older Workers; Organizational Climate; Productivity; Reentry Workers; *Retirement; Retraining; *Staff Development

ABSTRACT

Although workplaces are searching for ways to increase productivity, older workers asking for increased career development opportunities are neglected by most workplaces. Age alone may not be a defining characteristic of an older worker. Perhaps becoming an older worker is more situational than chronological. Retirement for future older workers is becoming an outdated notion. It may become a self-imposed status determined by the worker rather than an institutional norm. Rather than declining in productivity, older workers are becoming viewed as an asset that should not be neglected by organizations or by society. The trend is toward providing increasing career development opportunities for older workers. The continued skill development of older workers can provide workplaces with a pool of experienced, motivated, and engaged employees in an era in which older adults will comprise a greater proportion of the population. Helping older adults to consider second or even third careers, adjust to new technologies, and modify workplace ecology can become the new realities of the workplace. (Contains 39 references.) (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 361

The Older Worker
Myths and Realities No. 18

David Stein
Tonette S. Rocco

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE082749

MYTHS AND REALITIES NO. 18

The Older Worker

by David Stein
and Tonette S. Rocco
2001

The workplace for older adults is becoming a dynamic space rather than a unidirectional journey leading to retirement. Work life for older adults is situated in a dynamic pattern of periods of active employment, temporary disengagement from the workplace, and reentry into the same or a new career. The new older worker is developing a third stage of working life, the period beyond the traditional retirement age and final disengagement from the work role. The third age of life has been associated with choice, personal fulfillment, and liberation (Soulsby 2000). Using this idea, we posit a third stage of working life where older workers are active agents negotiating various roles within the workspace. The actions, depending on life circumstances, might include the decision to remain in, retire from, or return to periods of part-time, full-time, or part-season work. Thus, although workplaces are searching for ways to increase productivity, older workers are asking for increased career development opportunities and yet are still neglected by most workplaces. This publication discusses some of the misconceptions about older workers and the reality of a more active and involved older adult work force.

There Is an Age When One Becomes an Older Worker: The Age Myth

There appears to be considerable variation in the concept of older worker as defined by age alone. The term older worker extends from 40 to 75 years of age. When workers at age 40 are referred to as older workers, age is linked to beginning thoughts about retirement decisions (Rosen and Jerdee 1986), the decline in training opportunities (Cooke 1995), the dispelling of myths about the productivity of an aging work force (Kaeter 1995a), or the need for older workers to stay on the job to mentor younger workers (McShulskis 1997b). At the other end of the age continuum, older workers are identified as those in need of preretirement education and planning (Evans, Ekerdt, and Bosse 1985) or those considering gradual work reduction or seeking training for alternative careers (Salomon 1982). The concept of older worker encompasses different ages depending on the purpose of the organization as well as the needs of the worker. Age alone may not be a defining characteristic of an older worker. Perhaps becoming an older worker is more situational than chronological.

Retirement Is the Final Stage of Working Life: The Retirement Myth

Retirement for future older workers is becoming an outdated notion. From a societal perspective, the issue has changed from assisting older workers to retire and use leisure time to retaining and recruiting older workers. Recruitment and retention (Levine 1988) become a key policy issue to satisfy the increasing demands for productivity, worker shortages, and retaining corporate knowledge (Crampton 1996; Kinderlan 1998; National Alliance of Business 1996; Ohio Bureau of Employment Services 1996).

From a national policy perspective, increasing work life eases the social security burden (Cowans 1994; Reynolds 1994), reduces age discrimination (Perry 1995), and requires programs for reemployment and continued employment of older workers (New York State Office for the Aging 1992; O'Donoghue 1998). In the future, retirement will be interspersed with older workers cycling in and out of periods of active employment. Work will become an integral part of living (Geer 1997; Kotteff 1998; Stalker 1995). In the future, baby boomers may not be able to retire due to frequent job changes, underemployment, and not having acquired a consistent retirement package such as one might earn over a working life in a one-career job (Rusinowitz, Wilson, Marks, Krach, and Welch 1998). LaRock (1997) suggests that the small number of septuagenarians in the workplace indicates that workers are making the decision not to return to work. Retirement may become a self-imposed status determined by the worker rather than an institutional norm.

Older Workers Are Liabilities: The Declining Productivity Myth

Organizations are experiencing an attitudinal shift, seeing the value and importance of training older workers. During the past decade, advocates concentrated on convincing employers that older workers are capable of learning (American Association of Retired Persons 1993). Today, advocates are demonstrating that with training to maintain, enhance, or update skills, older workers are contributing to organizational productivity and may even surpass younger workers in reliability and consistency (Allen and Hart 1998; Ennis-Cole and Allen 1998; Poulos and Nightingale 1997). By implementing ecological changes in training and workplace design, the productivity of older adults can be enhanced (Labich 1996; Sterns and Miklos 1995). Older adults are now viewed as assets in terms of work ethic, reliability, accuracy, and stability (Catrina 1999; Kaeter 1995b). However, myths about aging still are present (McShulskis 1997a; Yeatts, Folts, and Knapp 1999) and some workplace supervisors still are unsure that hiring older workers is a sound investment (Sullivan and Duplaga 1997).

Older workers are also asking more of the workplace and asserting their right to make decisions to return or remain in the workplace based on availability of training, need to be engaged, or desire to develop a second career. Older workers are becoming entrepreneurs, beginning new businesses and hiring other older workers (Minerd 1999). Managers are advised to create meaningful work and to consider the role of work in the lifestyle of an older adult (Fyock 1994). States are considering planning processes to expand meaningful work and to help create work environments attractive to older adults (New York State Office 1992). Rather than declining in productivity, older workers are becoming viewed as an asset that should not be neglected by organizations or by society.

Older Workers Do Not Need Lifelong Development: The Career Development Myth

There is a trend toward providing increasing career development opportunities for older workers. Career development programs for older adults are a worthwhile societal investment. Community colleges and community agencies (Newman 1995) are taking a role in providing advocacy for employment, counseling, and development of new workplace skills. Partnerships among community agencies, educational institutions, and employers are suggested as an integrated approach to retraining and for providing reentry for older workers (Beatty and Burroughs 1999; Burriss 1995; Choi and Dinse 1998). The continued skill development of older workers can provide workplaces with a pool of experienced, motivated, and engaged employees in an era in which older adults will comprise a greater proportion of the population.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The New Workplace Realities for Older Workers

The literature on older workers shows a shift from concern for the individual worker perspective to that of societal concerns for engaging a significant component of the population in work. Increasing needs for productivity, financial strains on retirement systems, and a changing demographic structure are increasing the interest in older workers. The older worker is becoming viewed as a recruitable, retrainable, and retainable organizational asset. More prominent is the portrait of the older worker as an agent with needs, concerns, and work aspirations that need to be accounted for by employers. Older adults are becoming decision makers, choosing when and where to return to the work force. Investment in developing new skills for older workers is seen as a strategy for improving productivity as well as the quality of life for older adults. Rather than being seen as a liability, the older worker is becoming an investment in continuing productivity. Programs focusing on retirement may be replaced with programs and services concerned with preparing older workers for future employment. Retirement as an issue may be replaced with recruitment and retention as organizational issues. Employers will need to address flexible work schedules as well as policies such as elder care to attract and retain older workers. Challenges to institutions at both the corporate, community, and governmental levels will include creating meaningful work opportunities and addressing issues of ageism in the workplace. Helping older adults to consider second or even third careers, adjust to new technologies, and modify workplace ecology can become the new realities of the workplace.

References

Allen, J. M., and Hart, M. "Training Older Workers: Implications for HRD/HPT Professionals." *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1998): 91-102.

American Association of Retired Persons. *How to Train Older Workers.* Rev. ed. Washington, DC: Work Force Programs Department, AARP, 1993. (ED 392 893)

Beatty, P., and Burroughs, L. "Preparing for an Aging Workforce: The Role of Higher Education." *Educational Gerontology* 25, no. 6 (September 1999): 595-611.

Burriss, S. "So Why Aren't You Retired at Your Age?" *Business and Economic Review* 41, no. 3 (April-June 1995): 16-19.

Catrina, L. "Older Workers: Flexibility, Trust, and the Training Relationship." *Education and Ageing* 14, no. 1 (1999): 51-60.

Choi, N., and Dinse, J. "Challenges and Opportunities of the Aging Population: Social Work Education and Practices for Productive Aging." *Educational Gerontology* 24, no. 2 (March 1998): 159-173.

Cooke, L. "Over 40, and You're Out." *Computerworld* 29, no. 26 (June 26, 1995): 89-93.

Cowans, D. S. "Kodak Retouches Benefits to Slow Retirements." *Business Insurance* 28, no. 43 (October 24, 1994): 1, 35.

Crampton, S. "Transition...Ready or Not: The Aging of America's Workforce." *Public Personnel Management* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 243-256.

Ennis-Cole, D., and Allen, J. "The Challenge of Training and Retraining Mature Learners." *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education* 20, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 35-42.

Evans, L.; Ekerdt, D. J.; and Bosse, R. "Proximity to Retirement and Anticipatory Involvement: Findings from the Normative Aging Study." *Journal of Gerontology* 40, no. 3 (May 1985): 368-374.

Fyock, C. D. "Finding the Gold in the Graying of America." *HRMagazine* 39, no. 2 (February 1994): 74-76.

Geer, C. "Your Shadow Career." *Forbes* 159, no. 12 (June 16, 1997): 156-168.

Kaeter, M. "Age-old Myths." *Training* 32, no. 1 (January 1995a): 61-66.

Kaeter, M. "Un-retirement." *Training* 32, no. 1 (January 1995b): 63.

Kinderlan, A. "Older Workers Can Alleviate Labor Shortages." *HR Management* 43, no. 10 (September 1998): 200.

Kotteff, E. "As Glenn Tackles Space, Remember Elders Can Make a Difference on Earth." *Nation's Restaurant News* 32, no. 46 (November 16, 1998): 31.

Labich, K. "Making Diversity Pay." *Fortune* 134, no. 5 (September 9, 1996): 177-180.

LaRock, S. "Early Retirement Is Still the Norm." *Employee Benefit Plan Review* 52, no. 4 (October 1997): 34-35.

Levine, J. "Help Wanted: How to Cope with the Looming Labor Shortage." *Incentive* 162, no. 8 (August 1988): 54-62.

McShulskis, E. "Ease Employer and Employee Retirement Adjustment with 'Soft Landing' Program." *HRMagazine* 42, no. 4 (April 1997a): 30-32.

McShulskis, E. "Older Workers in Demand." *HRMagazine* 42, no. 8 (August 1997b): 18.

Minerd, J. "A 'Gray Wave' of Entrepreneurs." *The Futurist* 33, no. 6 (June-July 1999): 10.

National Alliance of Business. "Economic Change: Separating Fact from Fiction." *Workforce Economics* 2, no. 2 (June 1996): 3-6. (ED 398 423)

Newman, B. K. "Career Change for Those over 40: Critical Issues and Insights." *Career Development Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (September 1995): 64-66.

New York State Office for the Aging. *Workforce 2001: A Report by the New York State Task Force on Older Workers.* Albany: New York State Job Training Partnership Council, 1992. (ED 357 194)

O'Donoghue, K. S. "Old Reliable." *Incentive* 172, no. 12 (December 1998): 9.

Ohio Bureau of Employment Services. *Ohio Job Outlook: 1994-2005. Industry Employment Projections Report and Occupational Employment Projections.* Columbus: OBES, 1996.

Perry, P. M. "Don't Get Sued for Age Discrimination." *Law Practice Management* 21, no. 4 (May-June 1995): 36-39.

Poulos, S., and Nightingale, D. S. *The Aging Baby Boom: Implications for Employment and Training Programs.* Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 1997. (ED 418 265)

Reynolds, L. "Corporate Practices and Federal Policies Headed for Expensive Collision." *HR Focus* 71, no. 9 (September 1994): 3-6.

Rosen, B., and Jerdee, T. "Retirement Policies for the 21st Century." *Human Resource Management* 23, no. 3 (1986): 405-420.

Rusinowitz, L.; Wilson, L.; Marks, L.; Krach, C.; and Welch, C. "Future Work and Retirement Needs: Policy Experts and Baby Boomers Express Their Views." *Generations* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 34-39.

Salomon, A. "A Trainer's Guide to Retirement Planning." *Training* 19, no. 8 (August 1982): 42, 47.

Soulsby, J. *Learning in the Fourth Age.* Leicester, England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2000.

Stalker, P. "Wiser Policies for Older Workers." *World of Work* no. 12 (May-June 1995): 22-23.

Sterns, H., and Miklos, S. "The Aging Worker in a Changing Environment." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 47, no. 3 (December 1995): 248-268.

Sullivan, S., and Duplaga, E. "Recruiting and Retaining Older Workers for the New Millennium." *Business Horizons* 40, no. 6 (November-December 1997): 65-69.

Yeatts, D.; Folts, W.; and Knapp, J. "Older Workers Adaptation to a Changing Workplace: Employment Issues for the 21st Century." *Educational Gerontology* 25, no. 4 (June 1999): 338-347.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. *Myths and Realities* may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>.

Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus OH 43210-1090

BEST COPY AVAILABLE